

Strengthening the Human Capacity of the Muslim Youth through the *Makarantar Allo* (Elementary Stage of Islamic Education) for Self-Reliance, Poverty Alleviation and National Development

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Abstract

National development is an important issue that requires the participation of each and every member of the society. But the participation of each is determined by his level of education and human capacity, so it is expected that, each and every member should be fully educated, and his capacity be fully developed for self-reliance, poverty reduction and national development. While it is a well known fact that, the Makarantar allo and its graduates in the pre-colonial era had made tremendous contributions to the development of the community, that is not the case today. Today, the graduates of such schools cannot contribute fully to national development for a number of reasons. The paper intends to unveil the reasons for their lack of participation to national development, and also intends to emphasize on the need to review the curriculum of the makarantar allo to integrate human capacity development programmes in the learning process for a robust and relevant curriculum. This, it is believed, will help towards graduating students that are self reliant, and can equally render meaningful contributions to poverty reduction as well as national development.

Keywords: national development, human capacity, poverty alleviation, islamic education, *makarantar allo*

INTRODUCTION

There is no gainsaying the fact that, no human society can attain development of any kind without the contributions of all its citizens irrespective of age, sex or class. Allah created men and women as complimentary partners in progress and the contributions, efforts and commitments of each are highly needed as far as national development is concerned. The term development is very broad and has been interpreted differently by different scholars. It has been defined in Wikipedia (2014) as, “a deliberately planned effort to increase the effectiveness and/or help towards the achievement of a strategic goal”. It has also been defined in WordNet Dictionary (2014) as, “an act of improving by expanding or enlarging or refining”. What is interesting in these definitions is that, all agree that development connotes a positive change that is engineered by an individual, organization or government with the participation of the inhabitants of the area to be developed. And the participation of the inhabitants is largely determined by their level of education and human capacity (Adedeji, 2012).

Education is the bedrock upon which the development of any nation is built. That was why the United Nations listed it as the second Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to be attained by 2015. The UN considers education as a catalyst for achieving all other goals. Thus, it is considered as the most important ingredient for poverty reduction and sustainable development of any nation and in any

sphere, whether economic, political, sociological or human resources. As such, each and every member of the society should be well educated, whether through the Islamic system of education or western secular education for self-reliance, poverty alleviation and sustainable national development. The education of the youth should however, be given much importance and priority as it plays a very significant and crucial role in the development of a nation, considering the fact that, they are the future leaders of tomorrow.

Similarly, it is also believed that, the best form of development is building human capacity as the people so developed will contribute to the development of their communities and nations. Without human capital formation the goal of development or poverty alleviation is futile. Acquiring skills does not only increase the probability of being employed, whether self-employed or otherwise, but it is also a very important means of reducing the poverty of a given nation. According to Schultz (1971), capacity development has been recognized to be at the centre of poverty alleviation and development and that, without it, no development is possible and even past achievements could be reversed.

Islamic Education, Capacity Building and the Muslim Youth

Even though youth education plays a very significant and crucial role in the development of a nation, the status and standard of western secular education is at

its lowest ebb in most of the Muslim countries. Thousands of youth who are intelligent and capable enough to get education, are deprived of it, because of multifarious socio-cultural and economic reasons. Most Muslim parents refuse to send their children to secular schools, particularly those in the rural areas, for a number of reasons, which may include apathy to western education, the environment of such schools not being suitable for the children, or the western secular schools being too expensive. For these reasons, many lower-middle class Muslim parents do not allow their children to attend western secular schools, but feel more comfortable in sending them to Islamic schools. Studies have shown that, the Muslim students' enrolment in Islamic oriented schools has exceeded that in the secular schools (Habib, 2007). But unfortunately, the Islamic schools, especially the elementary level known as the *Makarantar Allo* which is being patronized by almost all Muslims, do not offer capacity building programmes, and hence, its graduates are unable to play the active role expected of them in the development of themselves and their society. There is therefore the need to integrate human capacity development in the *Makarantar Allo* curriculum so that Muslims particularly Muslim youth who do not attend secular schools, can be self-reliant, thereby reducing poverty as well as being able to participate fully in the nations' development.

Makarantar Allo and How it Works

Makaranta in Hausa Language literally means a school, while *allo* refers to a slate. Put together, *makarantar allo* literally means 'a school of slate'. This name refers to a school of the elementary stage of Islamic education, and it has many names in different Muslim communities. For instance, it is called the *Kuttab* in Egypt, the *Madrasah* in Pakistan, and the *Tsangaya* in the olden Kanem-Borno Empire. The Hausas call it so, because slate is the main apparatus or teaching equipment being used in such schools. This kind of school is considered as the centre of Islamic education, and in virtually all the Muslim communities, every child is expected to start his education with this type of school. Its main objective and priority is teaching the recitation of the Qur'an to the children, and it is expected that, every Muslim child must learn the sacred text or some parts of it by heart. Importance is therefore given to the recitation, writing and memorization of the Qur'an. According to Canham, (1978) "the complete possible exposure of the child (boy or girl) to the life-giving words of the Koran (sic), without which the child would have no hope of happiness in this world or of salvation in the next", is the purpose of establishing such schools.

The structure of the *makarantar allo* differs radically from the present day *Islamiyya* and the western secular schools, as its schedule is very flexible with

no clear cut classes or examinations. This allows a child to progress at his or her own pace. Thus the length of time it takes for an individual to memorize the whole Qur'an depends on his intelligence and commitment. Canham, (1978) sums it all when he says,

The structure of the Islamic education (*makarantar allo*) differs from the present day *Islamiyya* and secular schools. There is no clear cut division into primary or secondary levels. There is no progression from one class to another and from one level to another, with examination barriers erected all along the line. There is no age limit, and there is no rigid time-table with neatly timed period for subjects. What we have instead is a structure of utmost simplicity.

The *Makarantar allo* is expected to end with the complete memorization of the Qur'an, and a graduation ceremony is organized for the graduates. From thereon, the graduates may then move to the *Makarantar ilmi* for advanced Islamic education where other branches of knowledge such as *tafsir*, *fiqh*, *tawhid*, *mantiq*, *sirah*, *sarf*, *balagah*, *tasawwuf* and so on are being taught.

During the pre-colonial era, the *makarantar allo* was established as an organized and comprehensive system of learning, and was under the patronage and control of the emirs of the traditional system of government. The schools were funded by the state treasury, the *zakah* funds as well as the members of the community who readily supported these pupils most of whom came from faraway places. The system in return produced the judges, clerks, teachers, and so on needed in the community. However, when the British invaded and colonized the northern Nigeria, they killed some of the emirs and disposed others for their resistance to the foreign rule. Even those that were spared lost control of their territories and accepted their roles as mere traditional rulers used only for the indirect rule. This eventually means the patronage and the financial assistance of funds from the state treasury to the schools was withdrawn. The responsibility of the pupils was then taken over by the respective *malams* (teachers) who deemed it a moral and religious obligation to educate these pupils for the sake of Allah. But with the increasing level of poverty in the country, it became more and more difficult for the teachers to cater for their needs as well as their pupils'. The teachers had no option but to send these children out to beg from the good will of the society. You find these children roaming the street tattered, bare footed with no bearing, moving from house to house, city to city begging for crumbs to survive and thus leading a

vagabond life! With no skills acquired, since they have not been taught any, these children eventually face a bleak future. At the end of it all, they end up being petty traders or resort to menial jobs such as wheelbarrow pushing, touting and so on. Worse still, these children develop all kinds of mischievous and irresponsible traits as a result of their interaction with bad members of the community and may even end up being in bad company, thereby ending up as the armed robbers and fraudsters members of the society. So instead of becoming active members that can contribute to the development of themselves and the nation, they end up becoming a burden as well as nuisance to the nation.

Islam and Human Capacity Development

Islamic education plays a significant role towards enhancing the human capacity of individuals. This is because the religion of Islam and serves as a veritable tool for achieving meaningful development. In Islam, human development has been given a unique and important position as man is regarded as the vicegerent of Allah on earth who has the responsibility of safe guarding this which belongs to Allah (Q2: 30) And the main objective of education in Islam is developing the potentials of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to enhance the spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific and linguistic growth of man for the sole purpose of a positive relationship with Allah, which becomes manifest in serving Allah, doing righteous deeds and discharging duties towards fellow creatures. These objectives can only be actualized through resourceful and proficient human capital. This is because, the job of planning, organizing, controlling and producing, which is vital for economic growth and social development, is achievable only through multi faceted and resourceful professionals. In various occasions, the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W) insists that, “*al-mu'min al qawi khayr wa ahabba ila Allah min al-mu'min al dha'if*”, meaning that, “the strong and competent believer is better and closer to Allah than the weaker believer” (Bukhari, 1974). This hadith signifies the importance of ‘human capital’ in relation to social and economic growth of a society, hence the talented and skilful Muslim professionals are better than the laymen Muslims. Moreover, developing the human capacity is much more important than having the utilities of economic production in terms of money and machines. This is because, while utilities of production diminish through consumption over time, human capacity of knowledge, and skills grow through utilization. It is therefore expected that, Islamic education should be an avenue for strengthening the human capacity of Muslims particularly Muslim youth. This may be achieved when the mission, vision and the entire curriculum of *makarantar allo* are reviewed and integrated with human capacity development programmes.

Integrating Human Capacity Development into the Curriculum of the *Makarantar Allo*

Human capacity has been defined differently by different scholars, for instance, Schultz (1971) defines it as, “the knowledge and skills people acquire during education and training, and this capacity is the result of deliberate investment that yield return”, while Fitz-Enz (2000) defines it as “the development of a person’s traits, intelligence, fulfilling work energy, positive attitude, reliability and commitment, ability to learn, imagination and creativity.” What is important is that, both definitions accept the fact that, development carries the notion of enhancement of one’s capabilities and potentials which will allow an individual to achieve measurable and sustainable results, and also serves as a means of poverty reduction. It also implies a forward movement from a given position to a position of greater achievement, opportunity and benefits. Studies have also shown that, enhanced human capacity fosters self understanding, improves quality of lives and raises people’s productivity and creativity thereby promoting entrepreneurship and technological advancements. In addition, it also plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress thus improving income distribution which may consequently emancipate people from the clutches of poverty (Omoniyi, 2013). Thus it becomes necessary that the human capacity of the Muslim youth should be enhanced, developed and strengthened through the curriculum of the *makarantar allo* through the following ways:

1. The curriculum should maintain its programmes on Qur’anic memorization and other Islamic disciplines, with the hope that, the teachings of Islam will guide the lives of the youth wherever they are and whatever they become later in life. The development of personal traits and moralities is very important in developing a Muslim personality and should also be enhanced. Thus, traits like integrity, transparency, good governance, fairness, commitment and continuation of work, and so on will enhance the human productivity and competence of individuals.
2. Building up professional skills and knowledge which will permit them to pursue income generating activities after graduation, and achieve higher living standard. Islam encourages working and productivity as a means of sustenance, and this is only possible when an individual has the skills and know-how. The Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said, on showing the importance of work, “no one eats a better food than what he/she competently attained through his/her manual work” (al-Bukhari, 1974), and the best income according to the Prophet (SAW) is “that which proceeds from the work of one’s hand, as well as every

legitimate business” (al-Bukhari, 1974). Islam also discourages laziness and begging. It has even been reported from the Prophet (SAW) that he said, “it is better for any of you to carry a load of firewood on his own back than beg from someone else” (Malik, 1984). It is therefore believed that when members of a given society have a means of sustenance, the likelihood of such a society being poor also declines.

3. Developing the moral and leadership qualities of the students who will eventually become transformational leaders possessing a global view and sound understanding of the realities and challenges of global geopolitics, finance and economics is also very important. Likewise, the self-esteem of the pupils should also be developed by promoting such values as respect, dignity, integrity, and self-determination. Such kind of leaders will eventually be able to deal successfully with the global geopolitical and economic development and challenges of the coming decades.
4. Strengthening the accountability techniques of the pupils. Islam teaches accountability and always draws the attention of Muslims towards it. Individuals have been entrusted with different favours by Allah, such as good health, property, leadership and so on, and everyone will be held accountable for what has been entrusted to him. The Prophet (SAW), has said, “Each one of you is a guardian, and each is accountable for what is entrusted to him”. (al-Bukhari, 1974).
5. Developing the awareness of the pupils to health issues. There should also be an avenue where the children will be enlightened on how to look after their personal hygiene, environmental sanitation and other health issues. Let the saying ‘health is wealth’ be inculcated into them. In Islam health is considered as one of the greatest blessings that Allah has bestowed on mankind. In fact a hadith has shown that, the greatest blessing after *iman* (faith) is good health. The Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said, “Ask Allah (SWT) for forgiveness and health, for after being granted certainty, one is given nothing better than health”. (Muslim, 1993)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of human capacity development cannot be quantified, because it is believed that it is the cornerstone of poverty alleviation and meaningful development of a nation. That is why it is necessary that the *makarantar allo* should equally contribute its quarter towards developing and enhancing the human capacity of its students, particularly those at the higher level, by providing a holistic approach to human development, which should include moral responsibility, intellectual talent, knowledge and skills to its students. It is therefore necessary that all

stakeholders should contribute their quota towards achieving this noble mission, by the following;

1. Government should establish a board to be saddled with the responsibility of looking after the schools by way of reviewing the mission, vision and the entire curriculum of the schools.
2. Government should also provide the financial aspect and all other aspects of running the school, just like it is providing in the western system of education.
3. While the government should support the *makarantar allo* towards this project in whatever way possible, the contributions of all Muslims whether financially, morally or through their talents, skills and abilities is equally needed. Every effort should be taken, whether formally or informally, and whether individually or collectively to develop the skills and abilities of the students to be self-reliant, and also provide them with opportunities to maximize their contributions towards poverty alleviation for national development. So any expenditure in training, development, health and support is an investment, which it is hoped will yield fruitful result in the future.

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